

OLD LONDON BRIDGE.

THE annexed engraving is a view of Old London Bridge, taken near St. Olave's Stairs, about the year 1757, shortly before it underwent very extensive repairs and improvements, including the removal of the houses, which for several centuries encumbered and disfigured it from one end to the other. The date of this bridge is much better authenticated than that of most buildings possessing claims to a remote origin, for we find in the "Annals of Waverley" (an abbey in the county of Surrey), the following entry:—"1176. In this year the stone bridge, at London, is begun, by Peter, the chaplain of Colechurch."*

It was finished in 1209, having occupied thirty-three years in building. It consisted of a stone platform, erected on elm piles, driven into the bed of the river, and was 926 feet long, 15 feet wide, and 60 feet high. It had a draw-bridge, and twenty pointed arches, from 15 to 32 feet span, with massive piers from 17 to 30 feet thick, and of various lengths of from 26 to 115 feet. The longest pier stood in the middle of the river, and served as well for the bridge as for a chapel which was erected on it, and dedicated to St. Thomas-a-Becket. This chapel was a very elegant structure, and consisted of two chambers, an upper and an under one, or crypt, immediately on the starling; the communication between the upper and under chapel was by a spiral flight of stone steps. The upper chapel was lofty, and elegant, being supported by fourteen groups of clustered columns, and lighted by eight pointed windows. The crypt below was even superior, for, although it was not so lofty, the intersections of the pointed arches and windows were more beautiful. The length and breadth of each were the same, nearly 60 feet long and 20 feet broad; the height of the upper chapel was 40 feet, and that of the lower was 20 feet. This was the first building erected on the bridge, and was coeval with the structure. At what period the other buildings were erected is uncertain, but it is generally supposed that the towers were built soon after the bridge was finished. In the year 1426 the tower at the north end of the drawbridge, over which traitors' heads were usually exposed, was erected, but in 1577 it had become so decayed as to require removal. A new building was commenced, and the traitors' heads, amongst which were those of Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, and the celebrated Sir Thomas More, were placed over the gate on the Southwark side, afterwards called the Traitors' Gate. But the most splendid building that adorned old London Bridge was the famous Nonesuch House; so called from its having been constructed in Holland, entirely of wood, and brought over to this country in pieces, and erected on the bridge with wooden pegs only, not a single nail having been used in the edifice. It stood by the seventh and eighth arches from the Southwark end, projected considerably over each side of the bridge, and presented a very striking appearance from its varied and highly decorated architecture.

In the year 1582 the first water-works were erected by one Peter Morris, for the purpose of supplying the City with water, and six years afterwards three other water-wheels were erected at the Southwark end of the bridge for grinding corn. How long the latter mills remained is uncertain, the former existed until 1822, when an Act was passed for their entire removal, and the proprietors received 10,000*l.* for transferring their rights to the New River Company.

In 1754, the bridge requiring very extensive repairs, a wooden bridge was erected on the starlings, on the west side; the houses were removed, the centre pier and two arches adjoining taken down, and replaced by one large arch, the bridge widened several feet, and finally opened to the public in 1759. These alterations are said to have cost 100,000*l.*

The annual loss of life and property that

* This church stood, until the great fire of London, on the north side of the Poultry, at the south end of a turning denominated Conyboor-lane, and was famous as the place where St. Edmund and St. Thomas-a-Becket were presented at the baptismal font.

† From the same authority we have already quoted, namely, the "Annals of Waverley," we learn that the remains of the pious architect of the bridge were entombed in the chapel. The passage runs thus:—"In 1205 died Peter, the Chaplain of Colechurch, who began the stone bridge; and he is sepulchred in the chapel upon the bridge."

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